

REMARKS

In the present Office action, the Examiner states that claims 443 – 465 are pending. Claims 444 – 465 stand objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Claim 444 has been rewritten in independent form and claim 443 has been cancelled.

It is respectfully requested that a Second Preliminary Amendment and a Third Preliminary Amendment, both filed before the mailing date of the present Office Action, be entered. The Second Preliminary Amendment was mailed on 21 September 2001 and received by the United States Patent and Trademark Office (“USPTO”) on 25 September 2001. The Third Preliminary Amendment was mailed on 9 November 2001 and received by the USPTO on 16 January 2002. Copies of the Second and Third Preliminary Amendments are being submitted as a courtesy to the Examiner.

The Second Preliminary Amendment cancelled claims 448 and 452 and amended claims 447, 451, and 456. As a result of the Office Action and this Response and Amendment, claims 444 – 447, 449 – 451, and 453 – 465 are in condition for allowance and the objection of claims 444 – 447, 449 – 451, and 453 – 465 should be withdrawn.

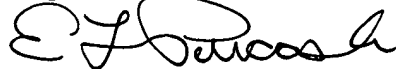
The Second Preliminary Amendment added new claims 466-471, of which claims 466 and 469 are independent claims. It is believed that claims 466 – 471 are in condition for allowance because claims 466 – 471 are similar in substance to claims 444 – 465 which, as discussed above, are believed to be in condition for allowance.

The Third Preliminary Amendment added claims 472 – 475, of which claim 472 is an independent claim. It is believed that claims 472 – 475 are in condition for allowance because independent claim 472 is similar in substance to independent claim 444 which, as discussed above, is believed to be in condition for allowance. Claims 473 – 475, which depend from claim 472, are thus also believed to be in condition for allowance.

Applicants have made a diligent effort to place the instant application in condition for allowance. Accordingly, a Notice of Allowance for claims 444 – 447, 449 – 451, and 453 – 475 is earnestly requested. If the Examiner is of the opinion that the instant application is in condition for disposition other than by allowance, he is respectfully requested to contact applicants’ attorney at the phone number listed below so that additional changes to the claims may be discussed.

Appl. No. 09/893,389
Amdt. Dated: 24 January 2004 (originally submitted 9 May 2002)
Reply to Office action of 12 February 2002

Respectfully submitted



Edward L. Pencoske
Reg. No. 29,688
Thorp Reed & Armstrong, LLP
One Oxford Centre
301 Grant Street, 14th Floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-1425
(412) 394-7789

Dated: 23 January 2004

Attorneys for Applicants